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BING TAYLOR – THE EARLY YEARS

by Janice Roth

This story on life in Lodi in the early 1900's was related to Nancy Schmer and Ralph Lea by Bing Taylor in 1999 at his home in Lodi where he and his wife Loretta have lived for the past 47 years.

Marvin Elmer Taylor, better known as Bing Taylor, was born on Christmas Eve of 1917. Two years later his family moved from their Ranch on Kettleman Lane to forty acres on Kennefick and Acampo Roads. Howard Buford Taylor was his father and Cora was his mother. Bings grandfather, Abel Taylor, served in the Confederate Army from Smithville, Tennessee, fought under General Braxton Bragg and was wounded having evidence "of some thirty odd bullet marks on his person," according to Bing.

Bings father was born in Barren County, Kentucky and was one of ten children, seven boys and three girls. They were very poor, many years less than \$100 cash came across the farm in an entire year. When Bing visited Kentucky about 10 or 15 years ago, he asked a cousin how a wounded Confederate Soldier raised 10 children. "They ate lots of possum, squirrel, cottontail rabbits, some pigs and geese, using their down for comforters, blankets they did without. They grew some corn; the miller kept half of it for grinding the corn," he replied.

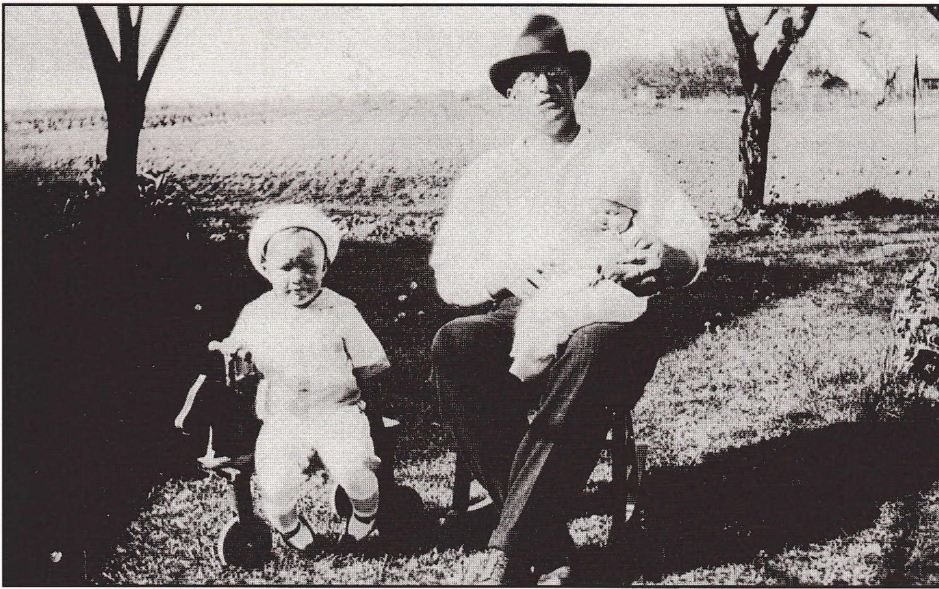
Bings father, H.B. Taylor came to California in February of 1900 at the age of 19 with the equivalent of a 3rd grade education. His older brother



▲ H.B. Taylor holding three-month old Bing with his mother inside the car.

lived in Loomis in Placer County and put him to work the very day he stepped off the train. "Here he was in California and thought he had died

and gone to heaven, 'cuz the sky was blue with puffy white clouds above the blooming peach trees, weather was beautiful, birds were singing and I was



▲ H.B. Taylor holding Wilma, Bing riding toy pony, on Kennefick Ranch.

plowing with the biggest horses I had ever seen," was his story told to Bing many times.

Another story Bing related was about "the time my father let an old mare get her flank up against the hydrant and snapped it off shooting water up in the air. He had never seen a pipe or hydrant before 'cuz back in Kentucky you built your cabin near a spring so you could get a bucket full of water when you needed it. Water spouted 8 to 10 feet high and my dad said he held his hand over the spout of water hollering for Buck, his brother. Buck came and my father asked him, 'How long will it take this fool thing to run dry?' Buck replied, 'As soon as the reservoir over on the hill is empty.' It was then that my father realized that he had much to learn here in California."

In 1903 or 1904, after reading about the Tokay Grapes that were grown in the area, Bings father contacted Mr. Tomayer, a realtor, who met him as he stepped off the train at the Lodi station. Bing tells the story as follows, "Mr. Tomayer handed my dad a pair of goggles and a duster. Never having been in an automobile my father wondered what the duster and goggles were for. Mr. Tomayer's auto-

the duster and goggles were for. That old car picked up dust like a vacuum cleaner and threw it all over. They drove past the Towne Ranch, formerly the Covell Ranch, where he saw his first Tokay Grapes and thought they were beautiful. The grapes were packed in four-basket crates and covered with a red cheesecloth. That was when he knew he had to have a Tokay Vineyard. The two men continued west until coming to Davis Road and then turned south, stopping at Kettleman. That day my father bought 40 acres of land that had 20-30 oak trees. Later that same year he cleared



▲ Young Marvin "Bing" Taylor on the family cow held by his father, H.B. Taylor.

mobile sat five feet off the ground and was steered by a tiller rather than a wheel. They traveled north on Sacramento Street until coming to Turner Road and then headed west. Turner had about six inches of dust as fine as flour made by the iron wheeled wagons hauling watermelons to the train station for shipping to market. It didn't take my father long to find out what

the land and the following year planted his Tokays."

Howard batched out on his property until he married Cora Lucas in 1917. She was originally from Texas, having moved to New Mexico and then in 1915 to Ceres. Cora and her sister would come to Lodi to pack grapes during the season and that is when she met Bing's father. In addi-

tion to working his forty acres Howard worked for the Earl Fruit Co. and later ran the Towne Ranch. It was his job, as a field man, to drive a horse and buggy in the area west of Lodi taking six to eight hundred dollars in gold to pay the crew. In 1921 he sold the forty acres to Thompson "Thompy" Moore for \$1000 an acre after having purchased property on Kennefick Road.

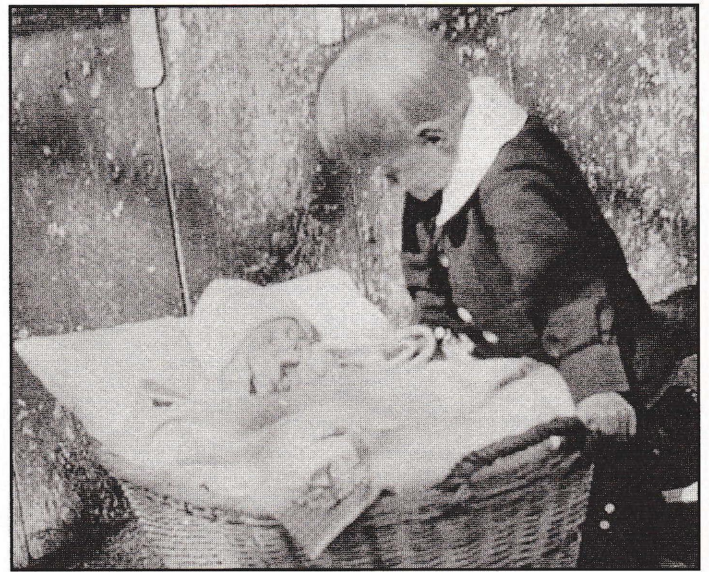
Bing's sister, Wilma, was born 21 months after Bing, followed by the birth of Virda, at the new house on Kennefick Road. At that time Howard was farming 40 acres, 20 in grapes and 20 in drying peaches. In 1924, brother Jim was born, then Louella and when Bing was in his teens Darlene was born. All six of the children attended Houston School and then went on to Lodi High School.

Bing has this to say about his school life, "I was five, and small for my age, when I started school. I excelled in reading but not in math (I hated it with a passion and still do). I read anything and everything. When

I finished reading the books at Houston I rode my bike to Acampo for more books. In those days teachers could recommend that a student skip a grade. I skipped the fifth grade, but fell behind in math and had to stay after school every day for special help in math and then come home to milk the cow, do homework and

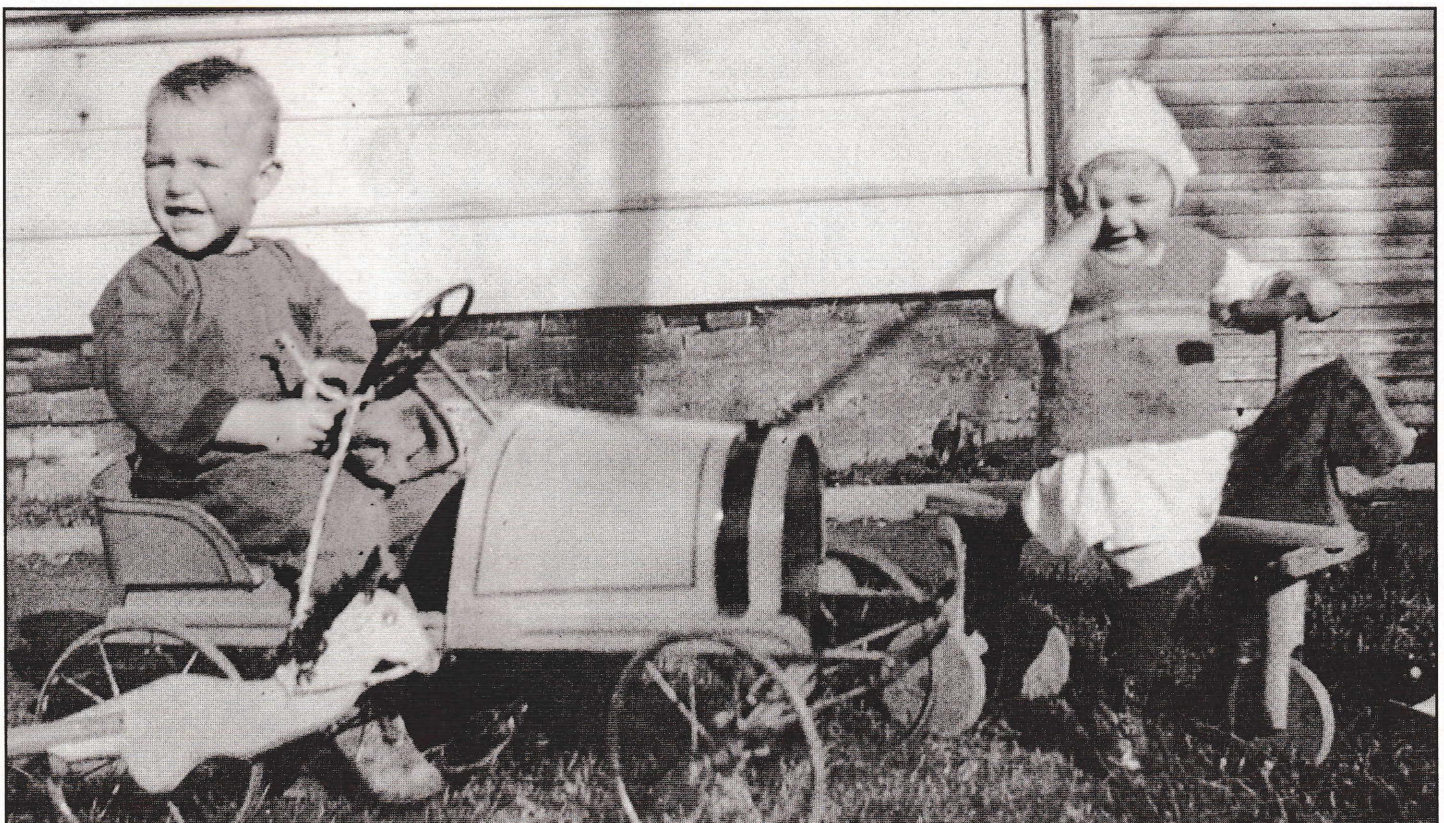
practice piano. They made a mistake when they had me skip a grade. I was totally out of place when I entered high school at age twelve and 86 pounds."

"The senior girls would have the big football players chase me, catch me, the girls would kiss me and then



Bing checking on his newborn sister, Wilma, asleep in the laundry basket. ▲

I would cry. But by the time I was a junior I was chasing the girls. My first year in high school I got a cinch notice in Algebra and failed the course. This just blew my dad away. His bright and shining light that had been such a joy to him during grammar school had failed a subject. I was not a very good student in high school but I graduated



Bing and sister Wilma playing in their yard at the ranch on Kennefick Road (1920) ▲



▲ Bing and sister Wilma playing in their yard at the ranch on Kenefick Road (1920).

with my class without failing any more subjects. I graduated in 1934 at the age of 16 and weighed 130 pounds. Newly graduated with no place to go, I was given a post graduate year of high school. I'd have been so much better off if they would not have had me skip the 5th grade. During the extra year of high school I took some subjects I should have taken earlier. I took chemistry, retook Algebra (getting a B+ this time), and German. I had good teachers throughout school."

In the early 1900's young ladies graduating

from Stanford and Cal, no matter how academically perfect their record, would be unable to get jobs in the cities because the big cities wanted teachers with experience. Newly credentialed teachers would come to Lodi and other small towns to teach for a couple of years. Many would live at the Hotel Lodi before returning to the city. Bing recalls, "We had some excellent teachers. I remember my second grade teacher was Miss Conrad, my third grade teacher was Doris Johnson and my fourth grade teacher was Miss Hanson. I remember every teacher I've had, some more fondly than others. My first grade teacher was Mary Wilder. She lived in the first house west of the Acampo Church in Acampo. Mary Wilder was the most beautiful lady I had ever seen at the tender age of five and I fell madly in love with her. A few years ago I found out that she was still living, called her and arranged to meet with her. Loretta



▲ Bing, (far left), spending a Fourth of July with his cousins at the Mills Ranch near Lockeford.



1930's hay wagon pulled by Silver and Brick. On top of hay, (r to l): Bing, mother Cora, and friends. ▲

(my wife) and I drove over to the bay area and spent the afternoon with "Miss Mary." What a wonderful, wonderful experience that reestablished relationship was."

Bing continued, "You know Miss Mary, when you left Houston School you broke my heart." "How's that?" she asked. "Well", I replied, "When I was 5 years old and in your first grade I was going to grow up and marry you." She said, "Well Bing, I got tired of waiting for you."

Bing relates further, "She was 94 years old and a beautiful person. After the visit we corresponded and I would call her at least once a month. She was a sweet wonderful lady. I also told her about the effect she had on my life. "Miss Mary, you taught me two things that have been a joy to me all of my life. You taught me to read music and I became an amateur musician. If I'd been more industrious I could have done more in that area. Then you taught me to read and I have been an

avid, voracious reader and have accumulated a nice library in my home. Those two things have been a joy and a pleasure to me all of my life."

The summer after first grade, he was six at the time, Bing asked his father for a job making plum crates. He was told that a box maker had to supply his own hatchet. Bing remembers asking his father where to get a hatchet and was told that Henderson Hardware carried hatchets. Bing remembers, "I asked my father for the money to buy a hatchet and was told that he would not give me the money but I could charge it at Henderson's. My dad said I could charge it to myself. At that time Henderson's was on Sacramento Street just north of the Arch, so my dad dropped me off. I stayed outside for awhile trying to get up enough nerve to go in and talk to Ed Steacy about buying a hatchet. Mr. Steacy's appearance was deceiving. He looked like an old grouch—never a smile on his face. In fact, the story

goes that he was asked to a Masquerade Ball on New Years held upstairs in the Mokelumne Club. Everyone said all he would have to wear on his face was a smile and no one would recognize him. Well anyway I finally got up enough nerve to go to Mr. Steacy and ask to purchase a hatchet on installments. He took me into his office and asked me my name. I said I was H.B. Taylor's kid. He wanted to know how much I would be paid to make crates. I told him \$1.00 a hundred. He also wanted to know how many crates I thought I could make in a day. I told him that I expected to make 100 a day. Then he said it would take me two and a half days to pay for the hatchet. I agreed and he gave me the hatchet and had me sign the tag in my own name. I was worried about paying that debt and to this day I rarely charge anything. After my dad died I found the Time Book that showed how much he had paid me for making those plum crates. Earning money making those plum crates taught me to pay

my own way at an early age."

Later in the depths of the Depression Bing had another occasion to be employed by his father. He remembers, "I was about 13 when he gave me a job picking peaches. At that time the going wage for a man was 15 cents an hour. The second or third morning I came to work and was walking up and down the rows of the orchard looking for my bucket and ladder. My father told me that he was sorry but that I didn't have a ladder and pail and didn't work for him any more. I was puzzled. He explained that he had called me in the morning in plenty of time to get up, milk the cow, eat breakfast and be to work by 7:00am. I had been 15 minutes late so he had given my pail and ladder to a man who had two children to feed. Well, I went from the absolute stratosphere to the sewer just like that. Yesterday I had a job earning money just like the men working on the ranch and now one day later unemployed. I moped around

the house for awhile and then finally went across the road to the Hansen's and asked for a job. Mrs. Hansen knew I had been working for my dad and asked me why I was no longer working there. I related the story to her. She asked if I would be on time if she gave me a job. She hired me and I was never late for work again."

Other jobs Bing remembers having in his youth include hauling grapes, selling plums and peaches and leveling land. His father had a big wagon that hauled 200 boxes of packed fruit to Earl Fruit Co. between Elm and Locust streets. Bing was 13 when he first hauled their crop into town and that was against his mother's wishes. Bing recalls, "My father told her that I had to get some bruises on my rear sometime and that I should take the wagon to town. I took it down 99 which was a two lane road and handled the wagon fairly well."

Bing worked one winter for

Clifton Steele driving 2 horses pulling a scraper to level fields. He had complained a lot to his father about the condition of the horses. One night after the Richfield reporter, Sam Hayes, finished the news Bing recalls his father "folded the paper and said that he was tired of having me run down my employer. He told me that all my life I would see people who make it their prime objective in life to do just as little work as they can and still hold a job. He also told me that if I would try to see how much I could do for my employer, not how little, that I would always have a job. He said that he wanted my team to be the first on the job and the last to return to the barn. I guess he really meant it because I would often see him drive by to see how I was doing. Soon I found out that what my dad said was true. Later in the year the other men were laid off and I was still working. Mr. Steele worked me another two weeks and I was getting 20 cents an hour. I have



▲ This load of grapes is being taken to Shewan-Jones Winery by Bing's cousin, Tex Taylor. Bing used this wagon team to haul grapes to the Earl Fruit Co.



Darlene, H.B. and Bing looking at their new 1935 DeSoto Airflow, purchased from Mitchell's. ▲

carried that philosophy in my own private business and with my customers."

Bing remembers that in the Twenties, everyone in the Lodi area seemed prosperous. Tokay Grapes were king of the table grapes. If one had 15 or 20 acres of Tokays paid for it was like an annuity and with 40 acres of Tokays you could send your kids to Stanford or wherever they wanted to go.

Bing recalls in 1923 his father paid \$3300.00 for a seven passenger Studebaker. It had two jump seats on the back of the front seat. He bought it from E.O. Mitchell in Stockton who took it down to San Francisco and turned that sedan into a touring car with horizontal sliding windows. An extra \$600.00 was paid for that "California Top" that had doors on tracks and leather upholstery. The sun shone through those windows on hot summer days. They kept that car for about seven years.

About 1929, the family needed another car and the Model A Ford had just come out, so Mr. Taylor had Bill Green bring one out to their farm on Kennefick Road. Bing said, "The whole family piled in. All seven of us. It was just too small. We were all very disappointed. My dad then bought his first used car, a Nash, from Alex Salomon of The Toggery."

The name "Bing" is another story Bing fondly relates. "Bing was not my father's given name nor mine. We got that name from Bing Kee, a grower in the Loomis area. My father worked in a packing house in Loomis and Bing Kee took a particular liking to my dad and wouldn't let anyone else unload his wagon. The growers and workers all started to call my father "Bing" after Bing Kee. Dave Richie and his buddies worked in Loomis during the fruit season along with my father. They then came to the Lodi area to work, along with my dad, and brought the name "Bing" with them. So now in Lodi my



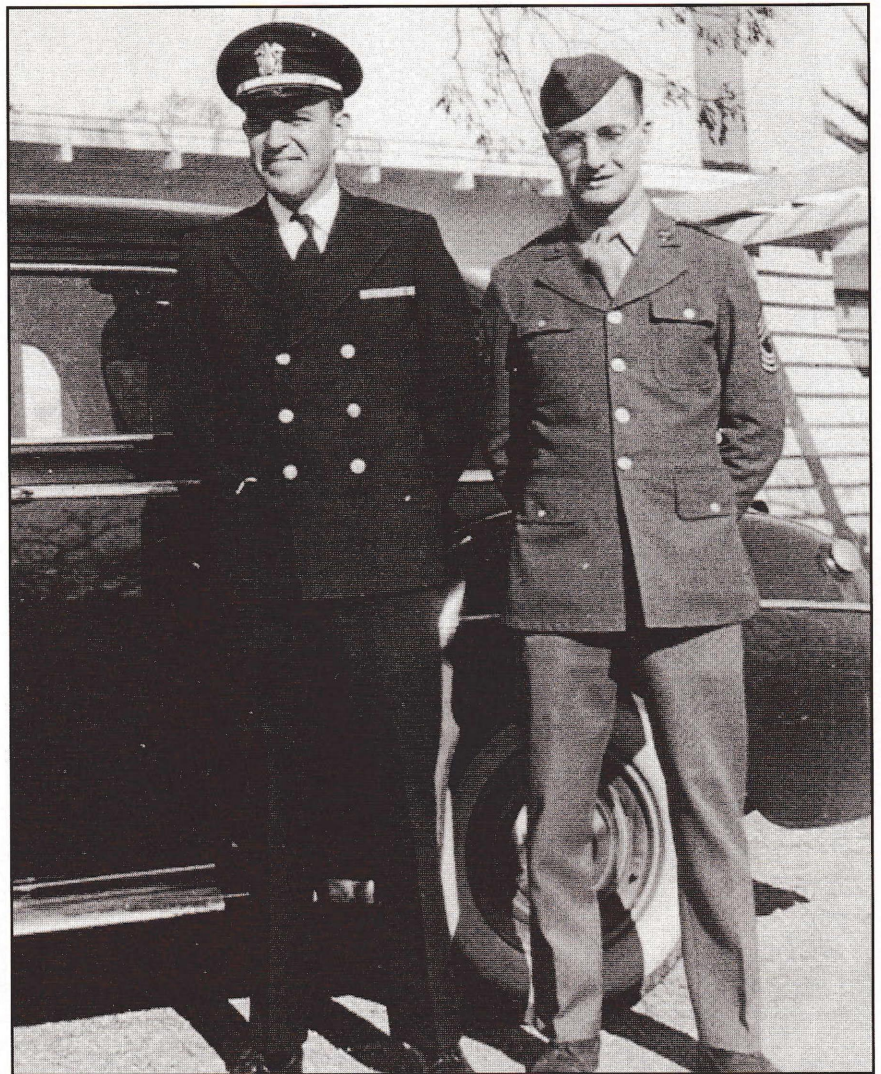
Bing as a young seaman shortly after being ▲ called to active duty.

dad was called Bing and I was called "little Bing." In high school I was Bing, in the Navy I was Bing, and today in the year 2000 I am Bing. After leaving the Navy and starting a business I had business cards printed using M.E. Taylor. I left cards all over town but no one knew who M.E. Taylor was so I have used Bing ever since."

Bing enlisted in the Naval Reserve in 1940 for a four year stint, one of which was to be active duty. In May of 1941, he was called to active duty and given five days to report to Yerba Buena instead of the 30 days promised. Bing would be at Pearl Harbor when World War II started on December 7, but that is another story.

*Transcribed from tapes
by Lucy Reller.*

►
Bing and friend
Grant Mitchell.



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▲ Bing's favorite Ford convertible.